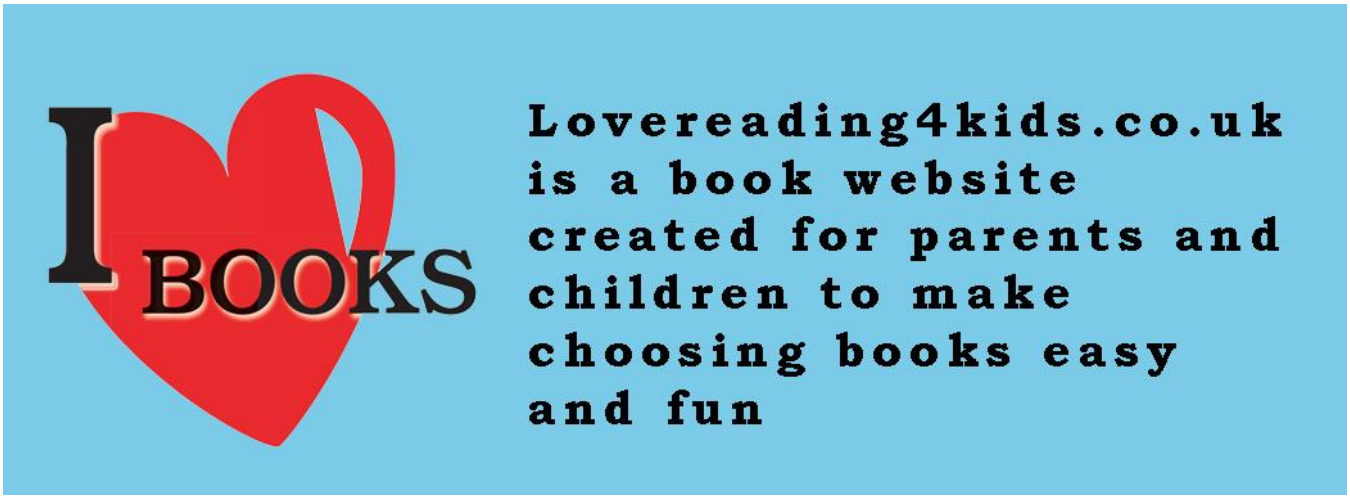

Opening extract from

The Wonderful Adventures of Nils

Written by

Selma Lagerlof

Adapted by **Kochka**

Illustrated by

Olivier Latyk

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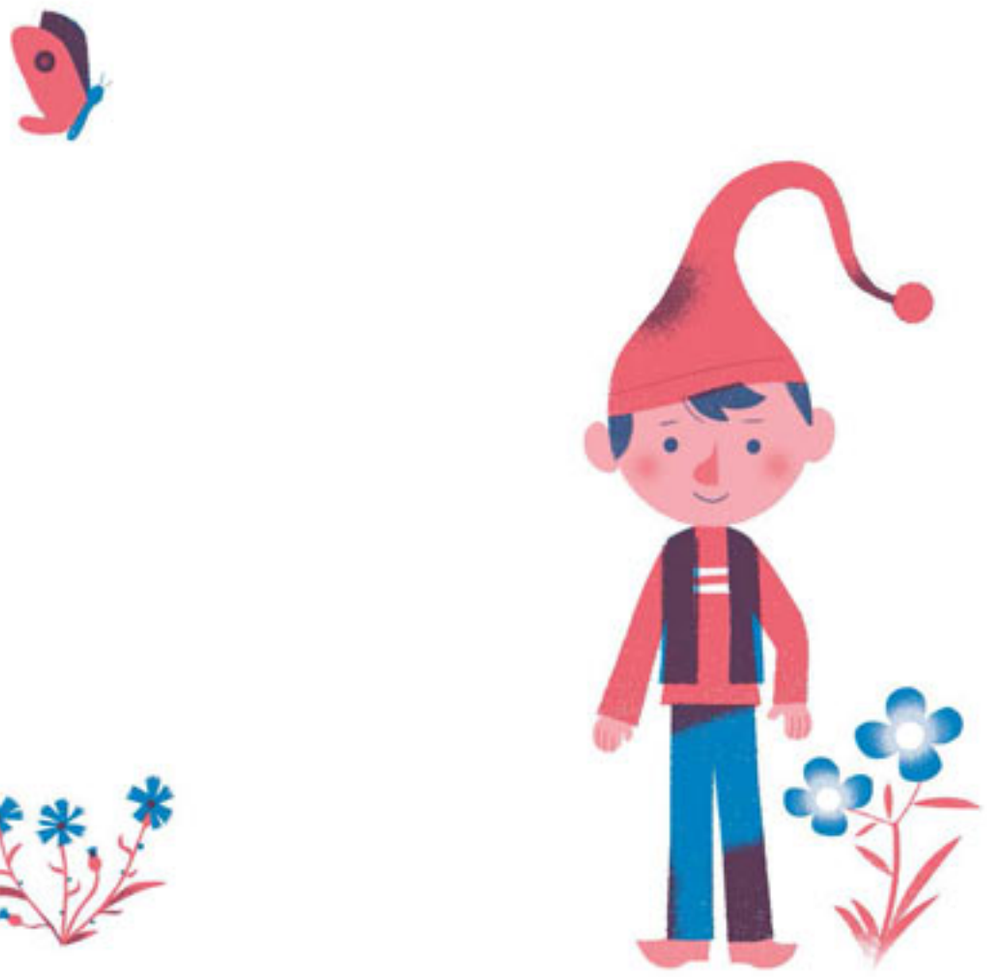
Written by Selma Lagerlöf, adapted by **Kochka**

Illustrated by Olivier Latyk



Thank you to the old lady of
Mårbacka, whose steps
I've loved following
K.

For Léon,
Maja and Henri.
O. L.

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Nils knew Skansen because he had visited Stockholm before. It was an outdoor museum that gathered peculiar objects and animals from the whole country. And now, he thought, people will come and watch me as if I were some sort of curiosity in a doll's house!

Downhearted, Nils looked through a hole in the basket and bobbing about the museum saw a squirrel that looked just like Sirle. With his hope renewed, he took his knife out of his pocket and cut his way out of his wicker prison.

The days passed in Skansen. Not knowing where to go, Nils stayed in the museum and made new friends, but they were all very sad from being kept in captivity so long. One summer morning, as his heart was filled with memories of the geese, he reached the aviary. A golden eagle had arrived, not yet saddened by his captivity. Nils recognised him at once.

"Gorgo!"

The eagle opened his tired eyes. "Is Akka also a prisoner?" he asked.

"No," answered Nils. "She's surely led all the geese safely to Lapland by now… Can I help you?"

"Yes, let me sleep," replied the eagle. "When I dream, I can imagine I am gliding through the sky, and never want to wake up."

"You have to," said Nils. "Otherwise you'll end up in the same state as the others."

"It is my wish," answered Gorgo. "I can't expect anything better here anyway!"

Among his many qualities, Nils was very stubborn. The following nights, he steadfastly filed the iron bars on the aviary's rooftop. And when the hole was large enough, he woke up the golden eagle. It took several attempts for Gorgo to be set free.

"I wish I could go with him," thought Nils, watching him flying away.

The eagle returned immediately. He only wanted to test his wings. He seized the child. "I wasn't going to leave you on your own," he said. "Let's go!"

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THE LADY WHO FEEDS THE BIRDS

After flying over green pastures, they reached a land of deep and dark forests.

"It must be impossible for humans to live here," remarked Nils.

"Not at all! For them, the forest takes the place of fields," explained the bird of prey.

He pointed out a place where only tree trunks and cut branches remained. "Here's somewhere that was harvested last winter."

Then, showing a narrow pathway, he added: "This is where they transported their heavy crops! And they used the Ljungan river that you see over there to carry it to the sawmill."

Nils was amazed.

The next day, when crossing the border of Ångermanland, Nils told Gorgo he was hungry. The eagle flew straight towards a bag of grain left by the side of a field. But some noisy sparrows alerted the farmer and he chased the eagle away.

Further on, a plate of freshly baked bread rolls lay cooling on a windowsill. Gorgo and Nils stealthily approached the plate, but as they did, Nils heard a voice.

"Come and take one," the farmer's wife said nicely.

While savouring the bread, Nils swore to himself that, once he was human again, he would come back and thank the lady who fed birds.

Later, with a following wind to make the journey easier, Gorgo gained speed.

"We're entering Lapland!" he announced.

But Nils's eyes were closing.

The eagle tightened his talons around him. "Sleep tight, little Thumbletot," he told him. "We're going to travel overnight. I'm not tired."